

Statement of Louis Hochberg, O.D.
Before the Public Health Committee
In Support of HB 5760
February 26, 2007

Members of the Committee:

My name is Dr. Louis Hochberg. I am an Optometrist in private practice in Hamden, and the Immediate Past President of the Connecticut Association of Optometrists. I would like to offer comments in support of HB 5760, *An Act Concerning Prevention Strategies for Vision Problems in Young Children*.

Last summer, I presented testimony before House Speaker Jim Amann's *Healthy Kids Working Group* specifically on issues related to providing eyecare to children in Connecticut. As you know, one of the main goals and objectives of that group has been to promote the idea that preventive care is more cost effective in the long run—and that as a state we should stress this in our healthcare programs and policies.

Requiring school age children to have a comprehensive eye examination by an Optometrist or Ophthalmologist will serve our children and our state well. It will help to correctly identify and treat those children having any form of a visual disorder long before the potential for permanent vision loss develops.

Certainly the requirement of an eye examination will result in increased utilization of health care services. We all know that. I want to explain the numbers to you so you can have a clear understanding and a greater comfort level with the issue.

Approximately 43,000 school age children will be affected by this legislation. Our research shows that about 39,000 of these children are covered under their parent's private health insurance or the HUSKY program. Ultimately, we believe about 1,000 children might be in the situation where their parents need help in paying for the exams.

We will take care of that. Three programs are out there right now to help. And, I'm here to tell you the Optometrists of Connecticut will step up to the plate. These programs are:

- Sight For Students
- Gift of Sight
- Project KidSight Connecticut—which has been set up by our own Association to provide care to those children in need.

If glasses are needed, these would be covered under the Husky program, or possibly through private insurance. Otherwise they would be paid out of pocket by the parents. For those parents who cannot afford it, the programs I just mentioned are available as a safety net.

You have heard mention this morning of the details of the Vision in Pre-Schoolers Study (VIP) commissioned by the National Eye Institute, which found that when the best

screening tests were used by highly skilled personnel, approximately two thirds of children with one or more VIP targeted disorders were identified. Said another way—30% of children with one or more of the targeted disorders were missed.

I would submit that a thirty percent failure rate is not good enough for our state's children. I urge you to do what is right and support this vitally important piece of health care legislation.

In closing, on a personal note, I have a brother who is functionally blind in one eye as a result of amblyopia or lazy eye. He was not diagnosed early enough to affect his outcome. I just don't want to see one more child in Connecticut have to go through that.

Thank you for permitting me to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.